House of Commons

Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee

Pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Professor Sir Tom Blundell

Sixth Report of Session 2008–09

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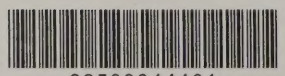
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Pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Professor Sir Tom Blundell

Sixth Report of Session 2008–09

Report with appendices, together with formal minutes and oral evidence

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 13 May 2009

MEDICINE & DENTISTRY
NA Hou/C

HC 506
Published on 19 May 2009
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£10.00

The Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee

The Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

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Mrs Nadine Dorries *(Conservative, Mid Bedfordshire)*
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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/ius
A list of reports from the Committee in this Parliament is included at the back of this volume.

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The current staff of the Committee are: Sarah Davies (Clerk); Glenn McKee (Second Clerk); Dr Christopher Tyler (Committee Specialist); Ellen Colebrook (Committee Specialist); Ana Ferreira (Senior Committee Assistant); Camilla Brace (Committee Assistant); Anna Browning (Committee Assistant); Jim Hudson (Committee Support Assistant); and Becky Jones (Media Officer).

Contacts

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Summary

On 13 May 2009 we held a pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Professor Sir Tom Blundell. On the basis of the evidence provided at this hearing we have concluded that he is a suitable candidate for the post.

1 Introduction

Pre-appointment hearings

1. Government proposals for pre-appointment hearings were set out in the 2007 Green Paper *The Governance of Britain*. The Government sought to "involve Parliament in the appointment of key public officials" to "positions in which Parliament has a particularly strong interest because the officeholder exercises statutory or other powers in relation to protecting the public's rights and interests".[1] The paper continued:

> The hearing would be non-binding, but in light of the report from the committee, Ministers would decide whether to proceed. The hearings would cover issues such as the candidate's suitability for the role, his or her key priorities, and the process used in selection.[2]

2. The Liaison Committee subsequently produced a set of guidelines to ensure pre-appointment hearings are conducted appropriately, and in order to "maintain an appointments process which is proportionate and continues to attract high-quality candidates".[3] The Liaison Committee also consulted with select committee chairmen on which posts should be subject to such hearings.[4]

Scrutiny of Research Council appointments

3. Between 2003 and 2007, prior to the introduction of pre-appointment hearings, the former Science and Technology Committee held introductory hearings with newly appointed Chairmen and Chief Executives of Research Councils soon after they had taken up their posts.[5] These hearings aimed to "satisfy parliament that the post has been filled with someone of sufficient calibre", and to facilitate understanding of the role and interests of both parties.[6] Following the *Governance of Britain* proposals, the Committee stated:

> We are pleased that the Government is taking steps to involve select committees more fully in the scrutiny of public appointments. We believe that pre-appointment hearings with the relevant Select Committee will improve accountability and help ensure that the right people are appointed to key positions. We recommend that

1 Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain* (Cm 7170), July 2007, p 28

2 As above, p 29

3 House of Commons Liaison Committee, First Report of Session 2007–2008, *Pre-appointment hearings by select committees* (HC 384) www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmliaisn/memo/hearings/m1.htm

4 As above.

5 Sir John Chisholm, Chairman of MRC, July 07 (HC 746); Mr Ed Wallis, Chief Executive of NERC, April 07 (HC 747-i); Professor Philip Esler, Chief Executive of AHRC, February 07 (HC 310-i); Professor Keith Mason, Chief Executive of PPARC, January 06 (HC 808-i); Professor Alan Thorpe, Chief Executive of NERC, October 05 (HC 491-i); Professor Colin Blakemore, Chief Executive of MRC, December 03 (HC 55); Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of ESRC, January 03 (HC 277-i).

6 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2006–2007, *Chairman of the Medical Research Council: Introductory Hearing* (HC 746), p 3

> Chairpersons and Chief Executives of the Research Councils be included in the proposed list of appointments that should be subject to these hearings.[7]

4. Such appointments were not originally included in the Government's list of posts to be subject to pre-appointment hearings. They were proposed by our Chairman during the Liaison Committee consultation,[8] and the Government's response included Research Council Chairs in a revised list of suitable posts.[9] We held our first pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Economic and Social Research Council (Dr Alan Gillespie CBE) on 5 May 2009.

5. The Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Rt Hon John Denham MP, wrote to the Chairman on 6 April 2009 indicating that Professor Sir Tom Blundell had been identified as the preferred candidate for the post of Chair of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).[10] We were pleased to have the opportunity to question Professor Blundell prior to his appointment.

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7 HC (2006–07) 746, p 6

8 HC (2007–08) 384, p 20

9 House of Commons Liaison Committee, *Pre-appointment hearings by select committees: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2007–2008* (HC 594), p 6

10 Appendix 1

2 Background to the post

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

6. The BBSRC funds non-clinical bioscience. It was established by Royal Charter in 1994 and, along with the six other Research Councils, is a non-departmental public body sponsored by DIUS. The Mission of BBSRC (set out in full in its Royal Charter[11]) is to support research; advance and exploit knowledge and technology; and provide training in the understanding and exploitation of biological systems.[12]

7. BBSRC's remit includes research into plants, microbes, animals (including humans but excluding human disease) and biological tools and technologies.[13] BBSRC focuses its priorities around three key documents: a Ten-Year Vision (last published in 2003), a five year Strategic Plan and a Delivery Plan for the CSR period. The 2003–2013 Ten-Year Vision is entitled *Towards predictive biology*. It focuses on the need to integrate the large amounts of data currently being generated in biosciences (through genome sequencing for example) with modelling approaches and tools that together can help explain the "function and behaviour of plants, animals and microbes at all levels, from molecules to populations".[14] The Strategic Priorities of the Council (due to be updated in 2009) currently include: supporting areas of science such as "Integrative Biology", "Sustainable Agriculture", "The Healthy Organism" and "Bioscience for Industry"; developing tools and technologies; and supporting knowledge transfer.[15] The BBSRC Council has considered whether food security should be the highest priority in its 2009–2014 Strategic Plan.[16]

8. In 2007–08 36% of BBSRC's research funding was directed to five Research Institutes (Babraham Institute, Institute for Animal Health, Institute of Food Research, John Innes Centre and Rothamstead Research),[17] which focus on "long-term mission-oriented research" in sustainable agriculture and land use, animal health and welfare, and biomedical and food sciences. [18] BBSRC currently has 2,149 staff based across its central office and institutes.[19]

The role of the Chair

9. BBSRC is governed by a Council comprising the Chair, the Chief Executive and 10 to 18 other members appointed by the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills

11 Appendix 2

12 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/royal_charter.pdf

13 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/science/remit.html

14 BBSRC, *A Ten-Year Vision: Towards predictive biology*, 2003

15 BBSRC, *World-class bioscience: Strategic Plan 2003–2008*

16 Minutes of the BBSRC Council meeting held on 9 December 2008 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/structures/council/2008/0812_minutes.pdf

17 BBSRC Annual Report and Accounts 2007–08 (HC 761), July 2008, p 7

18 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/institutes/institutes_of_bbsrc.html

19 Appendix 1, Annex B: The role of Chair

for their expertise, or as industry or Government users of BBSRC's research.[20] The Chair holds "overall responsibility for the governance and direction of the Council", which in turn is responsible for pursuing BBSRC's charter objects. The strategy of the Council is executed by the Chief Executive.[21] The current Chief Executive of BBSRC is Professor Douglas Kell, who took up the post in October 2008.[22]

10. The job specification states that the appointment to the role of Chair is for four years in the first instance. The post is part–time and non–executive, the Chair is expected to dedicate 20 to 25 days per annum to the role. An "honorarium" is paid (£16,180 per annum at appointment).[23]

11. A full description of the responsibilities of the Chair is attached as Annex B to Appendix 1.

20 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/structures/council/index.html

21 BBSRC Council Members' Code of Practice , February 2009, p 12–14

22 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/media/releases/2008/080707_chief_executive.html

23 Appendix 1, Annex B: Job description

3 The recruitment process

12. The Chair of BBSRC is appointed by the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, in a process that must be in accordance with the recommendations of the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.[24] DIUS informed us that the job information pack (attached to this report as Annex B to Appendix 1) was approved by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments' (OCPA) independent public appointments assessor before the post was advertised in the Sunday Times on 2 November 2008. The recruitment exercise was carried out by head-hunting firm Saxon Bampfylde which also conducted a search. All applications were put before a panel consisting of:

— Professor Adrian Smith, Director General Science and Research at DIUS (Chair);

— John Neilson, Director Research Base Group;

— Professor Dame Jean Thomas FRS, Master St Catharine's College, Cambridge;

— Professor Sir David Read FRS; and

— Ray Mingay (OCPA independent public appointments assessor)[25]

13. The panel shortlisted suitable candidates and held interviews on 26 January 2009. In accordance with the terms of the BBSRC Royal Charter the current Chair (Dr Peter Ringrose) was consulted, and recommendations were then made to the Secretary of State who "considered their advice and decided whom he wished to appoint".[26] DIUS also informed us that the Prime Minister was consulted (in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines[27]) and has given his approval.[28]

24 Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments , *The Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies*, August 2005

25 Appendix 1, Annex A: The recruitment process

26 As above.

27 Cabinet Office, *Making and Managing Public Appointments: a Guide for Departments*, February 2006, p 85

28 Appendix 1, Annex A: The recruitment process

4 The candidate

14. Professor Sir Tom Blundell began his academic career with a DPhil from the University of Oxford in 1967. He held posts at the University of Oxford and Sussex University, before becoming Professor of Crystallography at Birkbeck College, University of London in 1976.

15. In 1991, Professor Blundell became Director General of the Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC). The AFRC was incorporated with the biotechnology and biological sciences programmes of the former Science and Engineering Research Council in 1994, forming the BBSRC.[29] Professor Blundell became the founding Chief Executive, a post which he held until 1996. In 1995 he was appointed as the fifth Sir William Dunn Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge, and went on to become Head of Department of Biochemistry (1996–2009) and Chair of School of Biological Sciences (2003–2009). He is currently Director of Research in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge.

16. He leads a research group funded by the Wellcome Trust, BBSRC, MRC and industry. His research interests lie in investigating molecular structures and in the relation of molecular structure to biological function and diseases such as cancer. This research has led to drug design and he has co-founded two biotechnology companies, for one of which (Astex) he is the Chairman of the Science Advisory Board. He has also served on Science Advisory Boards of companies including UCB Celltech and SmithKline Beecham.

17. He was Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution from 1998–2005, and also recently held the post of President of the Biosciences Federation (2004–2008).

18. Current roles also include President of the Biochemical Society, Joint Editor of two scientific journals and positions on the Science Advisory Boards of UCB Celltech and Abingworth Management Ltd.

19. Professor Blundell's full CV is attached as Annex C to Appendix 1.

29 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/history.html

5 Our questioning

20. Taking responsibility for the overall direction and strategy of BBSRC involves the effective delivery of a budget that will rise to £471 million in 2010–11[30] and the provision of both fundamental and strategic science in fields that impact greatly on quality of life. We questioned Professor Blundell about his independence, priorities and the recruitment process. We felt it was important to discuss key policy issues that will affect his ability to deliver BBSRC's mission. We also discussed the fact that this appointment broke the previous pattern of an "industrialist" Chair with an "academic" Chief Executive, although Professor Blundell noted that he has experience of the business world. Areas of questioning included:

- his suitability for the role, including his approach to a non-executive role given his experience as founding Chief Executive of the BBSRC;
- his personal independence, including potential conflicts of interest arising from the fact that he had been in receipt of BBSRC funding;
- the relationship between BBSRC and Government, the impact of strategic focusing of science funding, and the redevelopment of the Institute for Animal Health at Pirbright;
- current and future priorities for BBSRC, including the 2009–2013 Strategic Plan and knowledge transfer.

21. A transcript of the hearing is printed with this report.

30 DIUS, *The Allocations of the Science Budget 2008/09 to 2010/11*, December 2007, p 29

6 Conclusion

22. **We are satisfied that Professor Sir Tom Blundell has the professional competence and personal independence required to Chair the BBSRC. We recommend that the Secretary of State proceed with the appointment and we wish Professor Blundell every success in his new post.**

Appendix 1

Letter from the Rt Hon John Denham MP, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills to Mr Phil Willis MP, Chairman of the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee.

I am writing to inform you that I have identified Professor Sir Tom Blundell as the Government's candidate to be the new Chair of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and Dr Alan Gillespie CBE as the Government's candidate to be the new Chair of the Economic and Social Research Council and to invite the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills (IUSS) Select Committee, if it wishes, to hold pre-appointment hearings in line with the new procedure agreed in the Government's Response to the Liaison Committee's First Report of Session 2007–08, HC 594.

Professor Blundell has had a distinguished career in the biosciences including having been Professor of Biochemistry and Chair of the School of Biological Sciences at Cambridge. The present Chair, Dr Peter Ringrose, retires at the end of April.

Dr Gillespie has had a distinguished career in financial services. He was a partner and Managing Director with Goldman Sachs and Chairman of Ulster Bank Group. He was Chair of the Commonwealth Development Corporation and Northern Ireland Development Board. The former Chair Lord Turner of Ecchinswell retired last September.

To inform the Committee's decision on whether on not to hold a hearing and in anticipation of the Committee wishing to do so I annex details of the legal basis of the appointments and the recruitment process (Annex A), and attach the two information packs for candidates which includes a job description and person specification and terms and conditions (Annex B) and a CV for each candidate (Annex C).

April 2009

Annex A

Legal basis

Both BBSRC and ESRC were formed under the provisions of section 1(1) (c) of the Science and Technology Act 1965. Appointments to both of the Research Councils are made by the Secretary of State for Innovation Universities and Skills under the terms of section 4 of their Royal Charters.

BBSRC

4. (1) The Council shall consist of a Chair, a Chief Executive and Deputy Chair, and not less than ten nor more than eighteen other members, at least half of whom shall be appointed by reason of their qualifications in science or engineering.

(2) Subject to the provisions of paragraph (3) of this Article, the Chair, the Chief Executive and Deputy Chair, and the other members shall be appointed and the terms of their appointment or the revocation of any appointment determined by Our Secretary of State.

(3) (a) Before appointing any member, including the Chair and the Chief Executive and Deputy Chair, on account of his qualifications in science or engineering, Our Secretary of State shall consult the President for the time being of Our Royal Society or of Our Royal Academy of Engineering as Our Secretary of State shall see fit.

(b) Before appointing any member, including the Chair and the Chief Executive and Deputy Chair, Our Secretary of State shall consult the Chair for the time being of the Council, who may consult other members of the Council as he shall see fit.

(4) Every member, including the Chair and the Chief Executive and Deputy Chair, shall hold and vacate his office solely in accordance with the terms of his appointment, and shall, on the expiry of his term of appointment, be eligible for re-appointment but

(a) a member shall not be appointed for a term of more than four years;
(b) a member who is re-appointed on ceasing to be a member shall not again be eligible for re-appointment before the expiration of one year from the end of the period for which he is re-appointed: provided that this sub-paragraph shall not apply to a person appointed to serve as Chair or Chief Executive and Deputy Chair or to a person who is a civil servant or who is employed by a Research Council;

(c) a member may at any time by notice in writing to Our Secretary of State resign his office; and
(d) any member who is also employed as a civil servant or who is also employed by a Research Council shall hold his office only so long as he is so employed.

(5) Except as provided in paragraph (7) of this Article, the Council shall in the case of any such member as Our Secretary of State may determine
(a) pay to him such remuneration and allowances as may be so determined in his case; and
(b) pay to or in respect of him such pension, allowance or gratuity on his retirement or death, or make such payments towards provision for such a pension, allowance or gratuity, as may be so determined in his case.

(6) If a person ceases to be a member of the Council otherwise than on the expiration of his term of office, and it appears to Our Secretary of State that there are special circumstances which make it right that that person should receive compensation, the Council shall make to that person a payment of such amount as Our Secretary of State may determine.

(7) The Council shall not in any circumstances or at any time make to or in respect of any person in his capacity as a member of the Council any payment of any kind whatsoever for or in respect of any period when he is also a member of the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales or the Northern Ireland Assembly (when so constituted), other than a payment by way of reimbursement to him of actual out of pocket expenses previously and necessarily incurred by him in the performance of his duties as such member of the Council.

(8) The provisions of paragraphs (5) and (6) of this Article shall not apply to a member who is an officer of a Department of Our Government.

The recruitment process

The process for both Councils followed the recommendations of the Code of practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments as it applies to upper tier bodies. Both appointment processes were overseen by panels:

BBSRC

Professor Adrian Smith, Director General Science and Research at DIUS (Chair)
John Neilson, Director Research Base Group
Professor Dame Jean Thomas FRS, Master St Catharine's College, Cambridge
Professor Sir David Read FRS
Ray Mingay acted as the OCPA independent public appointments assessor.

After preparation of information packs for each appointment, which include details of the role and person specifications and terms and conditions and which were approved by the OCPA independent public appointments assessor, both appointments were advertised in the Sunday Times on 2 November 2008 and recruitment consultants Saxton Bampfylde conducted a search. The closing date for both competitions was 19 November. Following consideration of all the applications, each panel compiled its short list and Interviews were held for the BBSRC Chair position on 26 January and for the ESRC Chair position on 9 February. In accordance with each Council's Royal Charter, the Chairs for the time being, Dr Peter Ringrose, BBSRC, and Professor Ian Diamond, ESRC, were consulted. Recommendations were then made by each panel to the Secretary of State who considered their advice and decided whom he wished to appoint. The Secretary of State has consulted the Prime Minister who has indicated that he is content.

Annex B

1. BBSRC

The Government has made a significant commitment to the science base in the UK in recent years with substantial additional funding. This and policy for the long term sustainability of the research base in the UK are set out in its "Science & Innovation Investment Framework 2004–2014". The Research Councils will continue to be the main route through which the public funds for the research base are allocated. They will not only be responsible for ensuring the prudent management of public funds and for ensuring excellence in research, but for also taking a strategic view of long term research needs and their impact on society and the economy.

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) was established under the Science and Technology Act 1965 and incorporated by Royal Charter on 1 April 1994 in response to the Government White Paper, "Realising our Potential". The BBSRC is a Non-Departmental Public Body and is funded mainly by grant in aid allocated by its sponsoring body, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

The BBSRC annual budget for 2008–2009 is £435m. The BBSRC Office is based in Swindon, Wiltshire with a staff of 263, plus other staff in five institutes bringing the overall total to 2149.

BBSRC Objectives

The objectives of the Council are:

a) to promote and support, by any means, high-quality basic, strategic and applied research and related post-graduate training relating to the understanding and exploitation of biological systems;

b) to advance knowledge and technology (including the promotion and support of the exploitation of research outcomes), and provide trained scientists and engineers, which meet the needs of users and beneficiaries (including the agriculture, bioprocessing, chemical, food, health care, pharmaceutical and other biotechnological-related industries), thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom and the quality of life;

c) in relation to the activities as engaged in by Council under a) and b) above and in such manner as the Council may see fit:

i) to generate public awareness
ii) to communicate research outcomes
iii) to encourage public engagement and dialogue
iv) to disseminate knowledge; and

v) to provide advice.

2. The Role of Chair

The position of BBSRC Chair will arise on 1 May 2009 on expiry of the term of the current Chair, Peter Ringrose.

The appointment will be for four years in the first instance, with the possibility of reappointment. It is a part-time and non-executive appointment, for which an honorarium is paid. The rate at appointment will be £16,180 per annum. Expenses will be reimbursed.

There is a degree of flexibility in the role, but typically 20 to 25 days per year are expected. Council meets five times a year and currently on two consecutive days at least twice a year, at locations and venues deemed appropriate for the meeting.

The Chair will work with the full-time Chief Executive, who is the Council's Accounting Officer, and a Council of 18 members, leading the BBSRC in pursuit of its objects.

The Chair will act as custodian of the Council's objects and Chartered objectives and is responsible for overall direction and management of the Council.

Job Description

The key responsibilities of the role are:

- The Chair of the Council is formally responsible to the Secretary of State, but works closely with the Director General Science and Research (DGSR) and the BBSRC Chief Executive. Responsibilities include providing effective strategic leadership, with the assistance of the Chief Executive, on matters such as:

- formulating the Council's strategy for discharging its objects as set out in the Royal Charter;

- effective execution of Council's decisions through the Chief Executive;

- encouraging high standards of propriety, and promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources throughout BBSRC;

- ensuring that the Council, in reaching decisions, liaises effectively with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS); and

- representing the views of the Council to the general public and representing BBSRC Council at various events, fora etc.

- The Chair will also be required to:

- ensure that Council meets at regular intervals throughout the year and that minutes of meetings accurately record decisions taken, record any conflicts of interests and, where appropriate, the views of individual Council members;

- provide DIUS with an assessment of performance of individual Council members, when they are being considered for reappointment to the Council or for appointment to the board of some other public body;

- work with the Director General Science and Research, the Chief Executive and the Council in the development of the Council's strategic direction and policies to deliver BBSRC's objects, within the overall framework of Government policy;

- work with the Director General Science and Research and the other Research Council Chairs and Chief Executives on cross council research and other wider science policy issues;

- work to improve the links between BBSRC, the research community it supports, industry, national and international science funding and policy agencies, including learned and professional institutions, and with Government;

- through membership of the DIUS Remuneration Committee consider the performance bonus of the Chief Executive and provide advice to DIUS;

- chair the BBSRC Remuneration Board which considers the pay and performance bonuses of the BBSRC Directors and other Senior Staff; and

- chair the Appointments Committee, which recommends to the Secretary of State, shortlists of members for possible appointment to BBSRC Council.

Person Specification

Experience and qualifications

The appointee will have the following experience:

- senior leadership in a substantial and complex organisation;
- non-executive or Chairing experience in a private or public sector body;
- financial planning and management;
- operating in contexts where the ability to exercise judgement across a broad spectrum of policy and high-level management issues has been proved;
- dealing with complex, difficult discussions with energy and diplomacy; and

- dealing effectively with governance and other governing body management issues.

It would be desirable, but not essential, for candidates to have experience either in a research led organisation or in one that has a strong interface with such organisations.

Skills and personal qualities

Candidates will also demonstrate:

- excellent intellectual skills and good judgement; and
- first class communication, relationship building and persuasion skills.

Candidates should have sufficient stature to lead the Council effectively as Chair, and have an interest in BBSRC's research areas. Detailed knowledge of these areas is not necessary.

Conflicts of interest

Potential candidates should be aware that the Council must avoid conflicts of interest in its work, and therefore individuals with significant responsibilities in other bodies funding biotechnology and biological sciences research are not eligible to apply. Applicants are asked to declare any potential conflicts on the application form and to note that all members of Council are required to declare any private, professional or commercial interests that might conflict with the interests of the Council, or which might be perceived by others as creating a conflict of interest.

3. Terms and Conditions

Remuneration/benefits

- This is a part time non-executive appointment for which an honorarium is paid. The rate is currently £16,180 a year. Travel and other reasonable expenses will be paid.

Length of the appointment

- The appointment is for four years in the first instance with the possibility of re-appointment.

  There is a degree of flexibility in the role, but typically in the order of 24 days a year are expected.

4. How to Apply

The process will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and will be independently assessed. Details of

OCPA can be found in the separate monitoring form booklet that accompanies this pack.

DIUS is committed to the principle of public appointments on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process and to providing equal opportunities for all, irrespective of race, age, disability, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and working patterns.

All applications will be acknowledged and put before a duly constituted committee including an independent member. The committee will in due course make recommendations to the Secretary of State. The appointment must also be approved by the Prime Minister and may be subject to a pre-appointment hearing with the Innovation Universities Science and Skills Select Committee of the House of Commons.

Saxton Bampfylde have been engaged to advise on this appointment and applications should be made to them to arrive not later than **noon** on **19 November 2008**

Please include in your application:

i. a full cv, including educational and professional qualifications, a full employment history showing the more significant positions and responsibilities held, relevant achievements and budgets and staff managed;

ii. the application form, summarising the most significant contribution or impacts which you have made with regard to the essential and desirable criteria, and the detachable equal opportunities monitoring sheet;

iv. the names and contact details of two referees who are in a position to comment on you professionally, with a brief indication of how long and in what capacity they have known you (referees will *not* be contacted before preliminary interviews); and

v. daytime and evening telephone numbers (to be used with discretion).

You may expect to be contacted by the consultant not later than 1 December 2008.

Saxton Bampfylde will conduct preliminary interviews during December 2008. Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to meet Professor Adrian Smith, Director General for Science and Research, before formal panel interviews expected to take place in January 2009. All reasonable costs incurred in attending interviews will be reimbursed.

Annex C

Curriculum Vitae: Sir Tom Blundell FRS, FMedSci

Chair of School of Biological Sciences and Sir William Dunn Professor of Biochemistry, Department of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge,

Date of Birth: 7th July 1942. Place of Birth: Brighton, Sussex.

1. Academic

1961 Open Scholarship in Natural Sciences, Brasenose College, Oxford University.
1964 First Class Honours, Brasenose College, Oxford University.
1967 D.Phil., Oxford University.
1967 College Lecturer, Hertford College, Oxford University.
1968 Junior Research Fellow Molecular Biophysics. Linacre College, Oxford
1973 Lecturer, Biological Sciences, Sussex University.
1976 Professor, Department of Crystallography, Birkbeck College, University of London
1989 Director, Imperial Cancer Research Fund Unit of Structural Molecular Biology
1991 Director General, Agricultural and Food Research Council
1994 Chief Executive, BBSRC (till 1996)
1995 Sir William Dunn Professor of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge.
1996 Head of Department of Biochemistry, University of Cambridge (until 2009)
2003 Chair, School of Biological Sciences. Cambridge (until 2009)
2009 Director of Research and Emeritus Professor, Department of Biochemistry

2. Honours

1984 Fellow of the Royal Society
1985 Member of EMBO
1986 Alcon Award for Distinguished Work on Vision esearch
1987 Gold Medal, Institute Biotechnology: Krebs Medal, Fed. Eur. Biochem. Soc.
1988 Ciba Medal, Biochemical Society; Feldberg Prize in Biology and Medicine
1993 Member Academia Europaea
1995 Fellow, Indian National Science Academy;
1995 UK National Equal Opportunities Award (for work in BBSRC)
1996 Gold Medal, Society for Chemical Industry
1997 Knighthood
1998 First Recipient, Pfizer European Prize for Innovation
1998 Bernal Medal and Lecture, Royal Society
1999 Founding Member, Academy of Medical Sciences

2006 honorary Member, British Biophysical Society; Honorary Fellow of Royal Society of Chemistry
2008 Associate Fellow, Academy of Third World Science

3. Honorary Fellowships and Degrees

Honorary Fellowships, Brasenose and Linacre Colleges, Oxford University;
Honorary Fellowship, Birkbeck College, London University:
Honorary Doctorates from 14 Universities

4. Sidney Sussex College

- 1995 Professorial Fellow, Sidney Sussex College. Cambridge University
- Development Committee. Finance Committee, Honorary fellowships Committee

5. Research Interests

I have an active research group of twenty five post-doctoral researchers, post-graduate students and technical/computer staff funded by Wellcome Trust, Gates. BBSRC, MRC and industry (total grants in past 9 years in excess of £5 million). I have published over 400 research papers (over 30 in Nature and Science). My research interests are in the definition of the architecture of macromolecules and their assemblies and the relation to biological function and diseases including cancer, Techniques used in my laboratory include biochemistry, protein crystallography and bio-computing. I have used X-ray crystallography to define structures of multiprotein complexes involved in DNA repair, including BRCA2 and mutations that occur in breast and other cancers, Conformations of polypeptide hormones, growth factors and their receptors, including work on insulin, glucagon, pancreatic polypeptide, oxvtocin, nerve growth factor, hepatocyte growth factor and fibroblast growth factor complex with its receptor architecture of cellular signalling systems such as protein kinases and their complexes that transduce the intracellular response to growth factors and hormones. These interests have led to work on rational approaches to drug design, I have pioneered methods of structure-based design in 1970s, 1980"s and early 1990's. In the past decade I have developed high throughput and fragment-based approaches to drug discovery and co-founded a successful company Astex. I have also produced extensive bioinformatics software that is used throughout the world.

6. Editorial Boards

- Joint editor, Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology, 1979
- Joint editor, Current Opinion in Structural Biology, 1995-
- Editorial Boards: Biochemistry 1988-1994: Protein Engineering, 1988-; Protein Science, 1990-1996: Molecular Medicine, 1994-1998.

7. Industry: companies founded, boards etc

- Astex Technology Ltd: Co-founder, 1999, Board Member, 1999-, Chairman of Science Advisory Board, 2000
- Biofabrika: Co-founder, 1989 - 1991
- Celltech: Consultant, 1980-1983; Non-executive Director. 1996-2004 ; Chairman of Scientific Advisory Board, 1998-2004
- UCB Celltech, Science Advisory Board, 2005 -
- SmithKline Beecham: International R&D Board, 1997-1999, Pfizer: Consultant in UK and USA, 1983-1990, Parke Davis: US Consultant, 1987-1990, Oxford Molecular Group: Scientific Advisory Board, 1996-1998, Bioprocessing: Chairman of Scientific Advisory Board, 1996-1998
- Abingworth Management Ltd. Science Advisory Board, 1986-1990, 1996

8. Research Councils

- Member of Council of Science and Engineering Research Council (1998-2000) and of Agricultural and Food Research Council (1985-1990)
- Director General. Agricultural and Food Research Council (1991-1994): responsible for implementing rationalisation of institutes.
- Founding CEO, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, 1994-1996.

9. Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (1998-2005), publishing reports on" Energy—the Changing Climate" in 2000, which introduced the idea of 60% reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, incorporated in the UK Governments White Paper on Energy in 2003; "Chemicals in Products", "Environmental Planning", "Turning the Tide—the Marine Environment" and "Impacts of Civil Aviation on Global Warming".

10. Other Appointments and interests

- President, Biochemical Society, 01 January 2009
- President, UK Biosciences Federation (01/04-4/08):UK umbrella organisation for life sciences, 70,000members.
- European Science and Technology Assembly, 1994-1997
- HFSP Council, 1996-1999

11. Government and other appointments

- Advisory Council on Science and Technology, Cabinet Office (ACOST) 1988-1990

- Council of Royal Society. 1997–1999
- Member of Board, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 1997–2006
- Trustee, Daphne Jackson Trust. 1995– ;
- Lawes Agricultural –trust, 1998
- Member, Board, Babraham Institute, 1996–2002

12. Personal

In my spare time I enjoy walking in Wales, listening to opera, playing jazz and international travel. I am married to Dr Bancinyane L Sibanda and have three children.

Appendix 2

The Objects of BBSRC, as set out in its Royal Charter, are:

a) to promote and support, by any means, high-quality basic, strategic and applied research and related post-graduate training relating to the understanding and exploitation of biological systems;

b) to advance knowledge and technology (including the promotion and support of the exploitation of research outcomes), and provide trained scientists and engineers, which meet the needs of users and beneficiaries (including the agriculture, bioprocessing, chemical, food, health care, pharmaceutical and other biotechnological-related industries), thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom and the quality of life;

c) to provide advice, disseminate knowledge, and promote public understanding in the fields of biotechnology and the biological sciences.[31]

31 http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/royal_charter.pdf

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 13 May 2009

Members present:

Mr Phil Willis, in the Chair

Mr Tim Boswell	Graham Stringer
Mr Ian Cawsey	Ian Stewart
Dr Brian Iddon	

Draft Report (*Pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Professor Sir Tom Blundell*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 22 read and agreed to.

Papers were appended to the Report as Appendices 1 and 2.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Oral and written evidence were ordered to be reported to the House for publication with the Report.

[Adjourned till Monday 18 May at 4.00pm.

Witness

Wednesday 13 May 2009 *Page*

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2008–09

First Report	Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies	HC 48–I (HC 365)
Second Report	The Work of the Committee 2007-08	HC 49
Third Report	DIUS's Departmental Report 2008	HC 51–I (HC 383)
Fourth Report	Engineering: turning ideas into reality	HC 50–I
Fifth Report	Pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Economic and Social Research Council, Dr Alan Gillespie CBE	HC 505

Session 2007-08

First Report	UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation	HC 185 (HC 459)
Second Report	The work and operation of the Copyright Tribunal	HC 245 (HC 637)
Third Report	Withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower level qualifications (ELQs)	HC 187–I (HC 638)
Fourth Report	Science Budget Allocations	HC 215 (HC 639)
Fifth Report	Renewable electricity-generation technologies	HC 216–I (HC 1063)
Sixth Report	Biosecurity in UK research laboratories	HC 360–I (HC 1111)
Seventh Report	Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Draft Apprenticeships Bill	HC 1062–I (HC (2008–09)262)
First Special Report	The Funding of Science and Discovery Centres: Government Response to the Eleventh Report from the Science and Technology Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 214
Second Special Report	The Last Report: Government Response to the Thirteenth Report from the Science and Technology Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 244
Fourth Special Report	Investigating the Oceans: Government Response to the Science and Technology Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2006–07	HC 506 [incorporating HC 469–i]

Oral evidence

Taken before the Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee

on Wednesday 13 May 2009

Members present

Mr Phil Willis, in the Chair

Mr Tim Boswell
Mr Ian Cawsey
Dr Brian Iddon
Ian Stewart
Graham Stringer

Witness: **Professor Sir Tom Blundell,** Chair-elect Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, gave evidence.

Chairman: Can I welcome this morning Professor Sir Tom Blundell, the Chair-elect of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, to be called BBSRC from now on. Welcome to our pre-appointment hearing. We are delighted that you have been brought to our attention by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister and we hope to have a very pleasant 40 or 50 minutes with you this morning. Thank you very much indeed for coming.

Q1 Mr Boswell: At this stage, can I just declare an interest formally. As I think Sir Tom will know, I am a former member of the precursor body, AFRC, as a Council member and our paths did cross at that time or just afterwards. I very much look forward to what you have to say to us.
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Thank you very much. It is nice to see you again.

Q2 Chairman: Sir Tom, you have clearly got a very strong interest in BBSRC's work, but I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about how you came to be on the shortlist for this particular post. Were you approached? Did you see an advert somewhere? Was it an inspirational thought on the journey home?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I am a basic scientist at one level but I have always been a scientist who is interested in policy, so over the past 45 years I have been a city councillor, I was on Margaret Thatcher's ACOST for several years—

Q3 Chairman: Steady!
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I chaired the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, all areas of science and policy. I have also been very heavily involved in translation of research into the agriculture but much more into biotech and pharmaceuticals. I have founded two companies. The activities of the BBSRC and, indeed, some of the other Research Councils, reflect themes that are very central to my life, which is how do we maintain excellent research in the UK and how can we translate it. In answer to your question, I was not originally thinking of applying because the model we had previously when I was involved in setting up the BBSRC was to have an industrialist as Chair and to have an academic as Chief Executive and I thought that model was being sustained. I was approached by various people who suggested I applied saying that those interests in both basic science and applications were relevant, so I put my name forward.

Q4 Chairman: When you say "various people", who are we talking about?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: A number of colleagues and also, of course, as usual, headhunters.

Q5 Chairman: Was this a formal headhunting company?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Yes, it was a formal headhunting company.

Q6 Chairman: Can you name them, for the record?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: It is the one I can never pronounce. It is Saxton Bampfylde.

Q7 Chairman: They approached you and colleagues thought it was a good idea. You mentioned the usual pattern, and it has been a pattern over the other Research Councils, is to have a leading industrial/commercial figure chairing, as you say, and an academic becoming the Chief Executive. Why do you think there has been this change? We know you more as an academic, if I might say, than a great tycoon in the City, or perhaps you are both, I do not know.
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I am not a tycoon in the City but I should say, unlike most academics, I have spent a very large time consulting for both large pharma and food; I have been on the board of a FTSE 100 company; and I have founded two companies. I may not be known in the financial side of the City but certainly my company is because we raise money there. Unusually for a scientist whose main interest is in medical applications, I have also had an interest in conservation and environmental and agricultural areas, so what I can do is to bring ideas about the translation of research to several areas where BBSRC has an interest. I assume that is why I am here today.

Q8 Chairman: You are currently in receipt of a BBSRC grant in terms of your research.
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Yes.

Q9 Chairman: Do you regard that as a conflict of interest and would you be relinquishing that?

Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think that grant has more or less finished its term now. I should say that my position is changing quite radically this summer. I am 67 this summer and the statutes of the University of Cambridge decree that I can no longer be head of school, which is equivalent to being dean; I can no longer be head of department; indeed, I cannot be the Sir William Dunn Professor, I have to be Professor Emeritus. Nevertheless, the University has agreed to pay my salary for another three years and I will be doing research but at a decreased level. It is currently funded by the Gates, by the Wellcome, and by industrial companies.

Q10 Chairman: In terms of the BBSRC grant, that runs out and you will not be applying for further BBSRC funding?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I have no plans at the moment. I think I have no space for it.

Q11 Mr Boswell: If we can pass on. Indeed, it occurs to me that we now have another joint common interest, not only the one I declared but also the fact that we are both 66 and I do not feel very Emeritus either. Talking about familiarity with the Council, do you think that would be a positive advantage in this role? To put the converse, would it have been better to have had a completely fresh pair of eyes that had never seen the Council before?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: As you imply, there are two sides to this discussion. I should say that when I finished being Chief Executive at the BBSRC, and previously I had been Director-General of the AFRC, which is now 13 years ago, as a matter of principle I had nothing to do with the policy of the BBSRC. I thought it would have been wrong for me in any way in public to put forward views about how my successors, Professor Goodfellow most recently and Dr Baker before, should proceed, so I kept out of it. I am now not terribly familiar, as I discovered, with the workings and structure of the present Council. Actually I feel quite fresh coming back to it. What I am aware of is I need to remember everything I have learnt from being on boards where there is a non-executive chair and a chief executive and to remember the distinction between the two roles. I have worked in both capacities in a number of bodies before.

Q12 Mr Boswell: You mean you have had this transition from an executive role to a non-executive chair role in other experience?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Yes. For example, I have been President of the Biosciences Federation, which is a non-executive chair, and I had a paid chief executive. I am presently President of the Biochemical Society and that is equivalent to non-executive chair of its Council, and I have a chief executive. I have been on many boards and watched the way they operate. I had the great advantage of working with Sir Alistair Grant, who was chairman when I was a chief executive so I have a role model to follow, and quite a challenging one I think.

Q13 Mr Boswell: Thank you for that. We are not here for a seminar on corporate governance, but what would you see as being the main distinctions between having been the secretary and now hopefully being the Chair? What are the differences of responsibility?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: A chief executive is the executive responsible in all ways to the board for the conduct of business of the research council whereas a chairman has responsibilities to make sure that the affairs of Council are properly conducted, that the affairs of the body are following proper procedures, and to give strategic direction and advice mainly by networking and bringing experience from the industrial side—from agriculture, environment, pharmaceuticals—and also linking in with ministers and giving advice. There is a very clear distinction in my mind.

Q14 Ian Stewart: If I might just ask you a clutch of questions about the evolution of your role if this is confirmed. I think very commendably, if I may say, you embodied Baldwin's Doctrine that on retirement you should not talk to the captain or spit on the deck, which I think is a wonderful summary of how you should leave a particular role. I am going to tempt you a bit in terms of your take on the Council since you left and whether at this stage you have any views as to current strengths and weaknesses as to what it is doing. Maybe I can put all this together because it is probably relevant: areas where maybe the emphasis in the corporate plan may not be quite as you expected them to be; areas that you do not know as much about as you might do had you continued as secretary; and, indeed, one final question, because it is a Chair responsibility, anything in the composition of the Council that strikes you. That is a bit of a portfolio. I realise you will not want to give us a detailed answer, but what looks to be the sort of area you might apply yourself to as Chairman?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think the 1993 White Paper looking at the way that basic science should contribute to the health and wealth of the country still remains pretty well good guidance and largely it is embodied in recent statements coming out of DIUS. In the UK there have been huge pressures on the Government over the past years. I think the expectation that research in the private sector would increase with increasing investment in the science base has not been forthcoming, so there are going to be pressures to realise other mechanisms for increasing translation of research. Although the underlying principles have stayed the same, the pressures are probably now more acute. Incidentally, it is very similar in the charities. I am very much involved in both the Wellcome and the Cancer Research UK through the Institute of Cancer Research and there has been a very similar change of pressure over the last 15 years. Again, ultimately it comes from concern of the public, in thet case of charities those who donate, about whether the institutions are really delivering from their basic science. It is a very significant change.

Chairman: We want to return to that point later. Can you respond to Mr Boswell's comments particularly about the state of the Council?

Q15 Mr Boswell: The state of the Council, the state of the board.
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: The state of the Council is reflecting those pressures and I need to spend further time to discuss with colleagues. It is an understandable development. Looking at the Council, it has a good spread of academics and those with industrial experience. I would venture two things about it. One, it probably does not have enough women on it. Women have been my bosses almost all the time. I have a woman head of college, a woman head of the university. I worked with Dorothy Hodgkin. I had a woman head of Birkbeck when I was there, and so on. We probably need more women on the Council. I also wonder whether the number of academics who are members of academies such as the Royal Society, Academy of Medical Sciences and so on might be increased. Those are my comments, but they are very much an outsider looking in.

Q16 Dr Iddon: Sir Tom, you have just mentioned translating research into economic impact and you said that seems to be a current focus. What interaction do you have at the moment with the Office of Life Sciences, which is a new creation? Can you tell us something about how you feel that should work?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I do not have any direct experience of that, but I think an Office of Life Sciences is a very useful innovation. I should say the chief financial officer of the company, Astex Therapeutics, which I co-founded 10 years ago, is looking after some of the financial aspects in that Office but I have not really discussed it with him. I do not have any detailed comments. All I can say is I believe very strongly that the life sciences have been under-represented. We have had a wealth of people coming into life sciences but the organisations both on the professional society side and on the Government side have been less well-coordinated than they might have been. That is why when I was President of the Biosciences Federation we tried to bring all the many societies with 70,000 members together to get some coherent interaction with Government. As you may know, there is now a plan to take that together with the Institute of Biology into a new society. There is a great need, because I believe biosciences underpin much of our health and wealth, to have that coordinated more efficiently.

Q17 Dr Iddon: Do you think your Research Council has adequate links with industry? Are they strong enough or are there some weaknesses in the way that BBSRC interacts with industry?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Again, I am not really familiar with the details of how the Research Council operates now. My model has always been consistently this: academics should be networked into not only the pharmaceutical and biotech industries but also the agricultural, conservation and health industries as well. Those networks allow academics to think about, to be aware of and to take advantage of any opportunities that might come out of their work in order to make it useful. It is very important to have a continuous interface. There is the old model of the academic coming along with a baton—a useful idea—and passing it on to the industry but that is not how it works, it is an interface going in both directions. It seems to me that BBSRC has been doing that pretty well. I am personally very well networked into small companies, large companies, to the agricultural industry and, of course, to environmental policy where I have contributed in many ways.

Q18 Dr Iddon: Where do you see the new growth areas in the life sciences that could lead to income for this country through exports and so on?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think there are one or two very obvious ones. There are obviously climate change impacts and the effect those have on the different ways we produce energy and food. You may know that I chaired the Royal Commission that produced the report *Energy—the Changing Climate* which led to the Government's 2003 White Paper and the proposal for 60% carbon reduction came out of my report, by the way. That is an area where biologists are going to have a major role because impacts are certainly going to be there as we are not reacting quickly enough. The need for more focus on production of food is a radical change that everybody is now aware has to come. Having been through the post-war period of research for increased production and then the withdrawal from that position—that was one of the main reasons why the old Agricultural and Food Research Council had a lot of its funds removed, it was considered to be too focused on production of food—we then focused on sustainable agriculture, sustainable food production. We now must put the two together and realise the challenges of producing food in the coming years will provide major challenges for biological as well as other sciences.

Q19 Dr Iddon: Is there a role for GM?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think there is a role for GM. I am one of those people who feel very strongly that the industry got it wrong the last time round. I organised and managed to fund the first consensus conference in the UK where we got members of the public in to debate. It was not a jury system, it was a consensus conference. I do not think we did enough of that. I remember the look of horror when I told my Council I spent 80,000 pounds on it; they were not very keen on doing that again. Then we had large companies coming in with different cultures from outside. We just had to pause on its introduction and think further. If we go forward again we need to make sure we consult the public at all stages, we involve them at the beginning in the process and in the deliberative phase.

Q20 Dr Iddon: You have already explained your relationship with the Chief Executive and the Council to Mr Boswell. Do you personally have a vision for the BBSRC and perhaps some plans which may not be in the strategic plan at the moment?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I guess that, if I had been thinking of taking this job and coming back in it and had been heavily involved, I probably would have a vision, but as it is somewhat of a recent idea for me that I should come back into the BBSRC, I certainly do not have a vision. I would want to talk and find out how things are now. I think it would probably be dangerous for me to have a vision before I have had time to think and talk simply because I would otherwise be bringing back what was relevant 20 years ago.
Dr Iddon: Where do you think the policy should come from, top-down, bottom-up? How does the BBSRC develop its policy at the moment?

Q21 Chairman: Dictated by the Government?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think the Haldane Principle, if it is a principle, is pretty good. I believe that Government has a role first to set some sort of strategic direction which they can implement by broad funding changes for Research Councils and other bodies. They will also have a role as a customer. One of the sad things over the past 20 years is the decrease of funding in the departments which has meant that energy research and many other areas have been very, very sadly depleted, and the same with agriculture, so the number of customers for research from Government departments has decreased which puts extra pressure on Research Councils. In summary I think the Government has a role in broad strategic direction and as a customer nearer market. The working out of what those strategies might mean has to come from a proper discussion with academics and the users and the public, and that is the responsibility of the Research Council. Certainly it is not the job of Government, in my view, to tell a Research Council what programmes they should be funding in detail.

Q22 Graham Stringer: Just going back to Brian's question about GM food, I was interested in your answer about consensus panels. Do you believe the public have very strong and, some would say, prejudiced views on GM foods? Do you think it is possible under the current circumstances to reach a national consensus on GM foods?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: In the UK with GM crops we have a culture which is very, very different from the United States, for example. I think that is why Monsanto got it wrong before; things are different in the UK. If you go to the US you have agriculture and you have the countryside and they are different. In the UK our farmers are the guardians of the countryside they will tell you, and I subscribe to that view, so there is a very close integration in the public's mind in the UK between the countryside and the production of food. This means that there are very much more complex challenges for us in the UK to take people along with us on any use of genetic manipulation compared to the US or in South America.

Q23 Graham Stringer: Does that mean the answer is really no, we cannot get a consensus?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: No. I think one has to proceed in a way where one involves the public, one involves everyone, and one needs to think through carefully what one takes forward. In the 1990s it was tomatoes that could be ripened in the supermarket. The public was not convinced by that, they thought, "Oh god, this is the supermarkets buying in lots of green tomatoes, they use chemicals on them and they will ripen them when they wish to sell them". If we are going ahead to use technologies like GM we have to consult the public, find what they think is advantageous and make sure they are involved in all the stages.

Q24 Graham Stringer: You gave a pretty stiff defence of the Haldane Principle in answer to a previous question. Do you believe that Lord Drayson's initiative to give a clearer strategic focus to science funding is in conflict with that principle? Are you relaxed about Lord Drayson's approach?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I have not had the pleasure of meeting Lord Drayson personally, although I have heard him speak. My own view is that he should set strategic directions, as I said, and I believe he is doing that, and to encourage scientists to think about that is the right way forward. Lord Drayson does emphasise the role of basic science.

Q25 Graham Stringer: Maybe you have not thought it through, but do you think there is anything in the approach that he has been talking about that will have implications that you will need to respond to from BBSRC?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: From the BBSRC side, in detail I have not seen anything which would cause me concern at the moment, but I am in a pre-appointment phase and would like to have a more thoughtful look at it.

Q26 Graham Stringer: This is a similar sort of question about the relationship with Government. Do you believe that you will get the necessary support from DIUS? Are there any particular areas of the relationship with DIUS that you believe you need to attend to on taking up the position?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I must say that, as a failed politician in my youth, I find being a politician much more difficult than being a scientist. Having retired from being a city councillor to the relative peace of doing research, I believe that I actually have much greater understanding, and certainly sympathy, for politicians than most of my colleagues. Over the past 20 years, both through the Research Councils and through the Royal Commission, I have worked in a fairly close relationship with ministers from both parties. I have always found them extremely receptive and, in fact,

sometimes very stimulating. I am sure that if I do have strong views I will be able to communicate them, and I look forward to it.

Q27 Graham Stringer: This is another approach to this series of questions. Do you think the priorities of the BBSRC should be, not the same as but reflect the priorities of DIUS?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think they are bound to have some reflection because they certainly have some of the same drivers. The broad areas where we might be able to use our science in a way that is good for health and wealth are fairly evident, so there is bound to be some sort of congruence of the two policies. At the moment I have not had any indication that there are significant differences. Certainly I think with the importance of sustaining the very basic science that contributes to founding some of our biotech small companies and the importance of keeping the science base to retain the large pharma investment—I would be extremely worried if the large companies like GlaxoSmithKline over a period were moving executives across to the States—we have got to keep our research here. In agriculture I think there was a lack of confidence for a period of time that science was needed and could contribute, but it has to contribute both in terms of environmental impacts and food production. It seems to me that those ideas are shared between Government and the Research Council.

Q28 Graham Stringer: My last question is not so unlikely a question in a recession. Lord Drayson's strategic focus is looking towards supporting the biological sciences, but if you were left with either a cut budget or a flat budget what work do you believe would suffer at the BBSRC?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I would really like to talk to the Chief Executive when I am appointed before I answer that. All I can say at the moment is that the strategic emphasis of the Research Council seems to be broadly on what I think is important, so I do not see any area which immediately needs reduction. I can see several areas, infectious disease in livestock, for example, where further attention is required broadly, but that probably means further investment.

Q29 Mr Cawsey: In a previous report that this Committee did on biosecurity we visited and saw for ourselves the Pirbright redevelopment programme and I just wondered what you think the financial and scientific will be to BBSRC of Defra pulling out of the redevelopment and how you are going to approach this problem?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: Clearly I have not been personally involved in the discussions but I am very familiar with Pirbright, which I have visited many times, and thought many years ago needed some attention. I am a little concerned that further investment is now needed in Compton and I do think it is important to invest in both parts of the research programme from the BBSRC side and from the Defra side. Personally, I do not see any long-term alternative other than keeping the research on exotic diseases, Category 4, fairly closely together with the research on endemic diseases like TB. In the longer-term we will have to somehow negotiate bringing everything together as was originally planned. We have no choice in the BBSRC at the moment but to go forward to make sure that Pirbright is secure, and state of the art. We also need to bring Compton alongside. We can then see whether we can get further integration with Defra research in the longer term.

Q30 Mr Cawsey: In an answer to Graham Stringer on GM you spoke about the importance of involving the public in all these kinds of debates. How do you feel about representing the views of BBSRC to the public? Do you intend to take an active role in doing so?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I have spent many years in all kinds of discussions with the public. It is one of the things that I think is important and I would be very happy to take part in discussions also with the NGOs, many of whom I have worked with very closely in the past. I have worked with Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth in the same way I have worked with the industry. I think a role of the Chairman is to play a part in that communication process.

Q31 Mr Cawsey: Finally, from me, the other thing is it is not just in the UK, it is about international work and international reputation of the UK, so how will you engage at an international level to ensure that UK biosciences remain world leading?
Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think it is going to be a challenge in the coming years. I am delighted, and somewhat relieved, that over the past 30 years from a time when I thought biosciences was considerably under challenge that we have managed to maintain a very strong position in this area. However, I think we do need to be aware of what is going on elsewhere. I do travel a lot. I am a member of the Third World Academy of Sciences and a member of the Indian National Academy. I am very much involved in interactions with India. I have been to China about 25 times, I guess, and am also very much involved in South America. We have to work together with them. Huge investment is going into science now in India, in Singapore and in China. I was in Eindhoven a few weeks ago visiting the factory where they make those incredible Titan electron microscopes that cost $4 million each. I asked, "Where are all those going?" I thought they were going to Germany and America, and they said, "These three are for German Max Planck but this one is for Singapore and these two are for Shanghai". I think we have got some challenges ahead of us.
Chairman: Could I finally ask you, Sir Tom, so much of research today is interdisciplinary the idea that you can actually compartmentalise the Research Councils into their traditional roles seems to be something which many people are challenging. We

were recently in the States looking at one of the Howard Hughes laboratories bringing together scientists of a multidisciplinary nature to look at some of the big problems in terms of researching the mind. Do you feel the days are numbered for individual Research Councils and this is the time that we should bring them altogether? Could you be a revolutionary?

Professor Sir Tom Blundell: There are arguments in both directions. I remember when the old Science and Engineering Research Council was there, it was large, it was bureaucratic and it needed to be changed. The move to smaller Research Councils created much greater efficiency, much greater focus, but it is something that moves backwards and forward. I see the importance of bringing policies together and integrating them is a very important part of science. I should say I am a person who has been in physical science faculties as well as biological sciences. I have taught in areas of physics and computing as well as in areas of areas of chemistry and biology. On my own research team I have got a nuclear physicist, engineers, computer scientists, chemists, biologists and clinicians. I am a multidisciplinary scientist. One has to have some sort of focus for an organisation, but at the same time one has to maintain the links and that is a challenge we all have. It is certainly going to be a challenge for the future. We should not just look at it in terms of having a physics department collaborating with a biology one, quite often you need physicists like Crick to talk to biologists like Watson and to be in the same lab. There are various models for this. It is a very, very important aspect.

Q32 Chairman: The purpose of my question was exactly that and whether, in fact, you felt that the Research Councils hinder that interdisciplinary work or do you feel they have sufficient structures to be able to create those dynamics?

Professor Sir Tom Blundell: I think structures can get in the way. I have got 12 people in my own lab writing computer code, really, really good computer scientists. I have got physicists running huge expensive equipment. I cannot see science going on without having that. It would certainly be a priority for the Research Council to make sure that we take advantage of that at all levels, at reductionist levels of investigating individual molecules, at the systems level of understanding how things integrate into cells and organisms and, indeed, in the way we transfer some of the science into practice, which involves engineering and physics.

Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for that, Professor Sir Tom Blundell. We are very grateful to you for your time this morning. I think I speak on behalf of us all that we have thoroughly enjoyed our time with you. We will now deliberate as to whether, in fact, we wish to confirm your appointment or not. I am sure you will wait with bated breath outside. Obviously the Secretary of State will inform you in due course. Thank you very much indeed for your time this morning.

ISBN 978-0-215-53033-2

9 780215 530332

Printed in the United Kingdom by The Stationery Office Limited
5/2009 428428 19585

Distribution by TSO (The Stationery Office) and available from:

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www.tsoshop.co.uk

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ISBN 978 0 215 53033 2